

TITLE
COMPUTERIZED SYSTEM FOR TRANSPORTING CARGO

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CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This invention claims the benefit of United States Provisional patent application identified as Application Number 60/141,947, filed July 1, 1999.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates generally to a system of marine, air and land transportation of cargo, freight, materials, and goods . In particular, this invention is concerned with a computerized system for selecting a cargo transporter and arranging for the transportation of cargo. This system is accessible to users via an Internet web site.

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Air and marine cargo carriers provide transportation services from ports of loading to ports of discharge. Land (road and rail) cargo carriers provide transportation services from distribution and other pick-up points to various delivery points. Customers or users can contact a carrier directly or through an agent to determine itineraries and prices. In order to determine which carrier provides the best match of service (type of cargo transported, price, delivery time, etc.), it may be necessary to contact several carriers. Contacting many carriers to determine a match and arrange for the transportation of cargo may be time-consuming and complex.

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Historically, agents played a large role in marketing and selling space on a cargo vessel such as a ship, an aircraft, or a truck. The large number of options for global cargo transportation services requires that many factors be considered when selecting a cargo carrier. Furthermore, many market factors can significantly affect prices charged for transportation services.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This invention includes a computerized system for transporting cargo with marine, air, and land carriers. The computerized system receives inputs from a user such as port of loading, port of discharge, and type of cargo. The system determines and displays carriers that provide service for the desired route and cargo. The system also provides information such as prices and customs requirements and enables a user to book the transportation of cargo. The system also creates a record of the desired service so that a user or an agent can use the information to finalize a transaction at a later time.

In a preferred embodiment, a computerized system for selecting a cargo carrier includes a host computer system having access to data of a cargo carrier. The host computer system is accessed by a user via an internet connection. Input means are provided for receiving information from the user into the host computer system concerning cargo to be transported. Output means are provided for sending information to a user of possible cargo transportation options.

Various objects and advantages of this invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments, when read in light of the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a schematic illustration of a computerized system for transporting cargo according to this invention.

Figure 2 is a schematic block diagram of a host computer system illustrated as part of the system in Figure 1.

Figure 3 is a title or start computer screen generated by the host computer system illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 4 is an example display page generated by the host computer system asking what type of cargo is to be shipped and what is the desired port of loading.

Figure 5 is an example display page generated by the host computer system listing sample ports of loading in North America.

Figure 6 is an example display page generated by the host computer system asking what is the desired port of discharge.

Figure 7 is an example display page generated by the host computer system listing sample ports of discharge in Africa.

5 Figure 8 is an example display page generated by the host computer system indicating a selected port of loading and a selected port of discharge.

Figure 9 is an example display page generated by the host computer system showing available itineraries from all carriers providing the requested service between the selected port of loading and the selected port of discharge.

10 Figure 10 is an example display page generated by the host computer system showing input windows for user id, password, and others.

Figure 11 is an example display page generated by the host computer system asking for dimensional cargo information.

15 Figure 12 is an example display page generated by the host computer system asking for cars, vans, and trucks cargo information.

Figure 13 is an example display page generated by the host computer system asking for break bulk cargo information.

Figure 14 is an example display page generated by the host computer system asking for containers cargo information.

20 Figure 15 is an example display page generated by the host computer system showing available itineraries for the entered cargo.

Figure 16 is an example display page generated by the host computer system showing payment options for the entered cargo.

25 Figure 17 is an example display page generated by the host computer system related to Bill of Lading information.

Figure 18 is a second example display page generated by the host computer system related to Bill of Lading information.

Figure 19 is an example display page generated by the host computer system listing a vessel itinerary.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

A schematic illustration of a computerized system for transporting cargo, freight, materials, and goods according to this invention is indicated generally at 10 in Figure 1. Individual computer systems 12A, 12B, and 12C of oceanic or marine cargo carriers are preferably connected to a computer system 20 of a host computer system. Individual computer systems 14A, 14B, and 14C of air cargo carriers are preferably connected to the host computer system 20. Individual computer systems 16A, 16B, and 16C of land cargo carriers are preferably connected to the host computer system 20. The individual computer systems 12A-12C, 14A-14C, and 16A-16C contain information such as itineraries for vessels, aircraft, and vehicles, available space, price, etc. This information can be linked to the host computer system 20 by an internet connection. This information can also be transmitted to the host computer system 20 by any desired means, including an internet transfer.

The host computer system 20 is connected to the internet 30. A domain name is provided so that internet users can contact the host computer system 20. An example of a domain name for the host computer system 20 is carriersnet.com.

Users 40 who wish to transport cargo, freight, materials, or goods can access the host computer system 20 through an on-line connection via the internet 30. Upon contacting the host computer system 20, a series of questions can guide a user to the available options for transporting the cargo. For example, the prompts can start with questions such as "port of loading?" and "port of discharge?" Graphic illustrations can accompany the prompts to assist the user. For example, a graphic illustration may include a map may with various click-on portions so that a user can point-and-click to expedite and ease the task of answering the prompts.

A schematic block diagram of the host computer system 20 is illustrated in Figure 2. The host computer system 20 includes a central processing unit (CPU) 22 that includes software. An input device 24, such as a mouse, has an output connected to an input of the CPU 22. A video signal output of the CPU 22 is connected to an input of a monitor 26. The CPU 22 can include a sound card for generating an audio signal at an audio output connected to an input of a speaker 28. An input/output port

of the CPU 22 is connected to an input/output port of a memory 29 that can be a hard drive for storing operating system software and an application program for performing steps according to this invention.

A system according to this invention for electronically selecting a cargo carrier and booking transportation of cargo is described below. A user 40 can access the web site of the host computing system 20 via the internet 30. Software contained in the CPU 22 can receive inputs from a user 40 and transmit responses to the user 40.

An example start screen is indicated generally at 50 in Figure 3. The screen 50 is generated by software of the host computing system 20. The start screen can prompt a user 40 in the use of the system 10. An example of a beginning prompt is to ask a user 40 to select one of three transporting options: oceanway 51, skyway 52, and land 53. A user can point-and-click on a button for one of the options 51, 52, and 53.

An example display page is indicated generally at 60 in Figure 4. The page 60 can prompt a user 40 to select a port of loading option 61. The user 40 can be assisted by a global illustration 62. The global illustration 62 can be rotated by clicking on arrows 63 or 64 to show a desired part of the world.

An example display page is indicated generally at 70 in Figure 5. A map 72 can assist the user 40. The map 72 can include numerous ports of loading that can be selected by clicking.

An example display page is indicated generally at 80 in Figure 6. The page 80 can prompt a user 40 to select a port of discharge option 81. The user 40 can be assisted by a global illustration 82. The global illustration 82 can be rotated by clicking on arrows 83 or 84 to show a desired part of the world.

An example display page is indicated generally at 90 in Figure 7. A map 92 can assist the user 40. The map 92 can include numerous ports of discharge that can be selected by clicking.

After a user has selected a port of loading 61 and a port of discharge 81, an example display page indicated generally at 100 in Figure 8 is generated by the host computing system 20. In the example display page 100, Miami has been selected as the port of loading 61 and Abidjan has been selected as the port of discharge 81.

The host computer system 20 will analyze inputs from the user 40 and provide available transportation options. An example display page indicated generally at 110 in Figure 9 lists available itineraries 112. Example of itinerary information includes vessel, voyage, Estimated Time of Departure, and Estimated Time of Arrival.

5 The host computer system 20 can also provide a quote, book cargo, and insurance, customs, and bill of lading (B/L) information. The host computer system 20 can also provide the client 40 with information regarding agents based on inputs received from the client 40. Input collected by the host computer system 20 can be forwarded to an agent for use in assisting the client 40.

10 The host computer system 20 can be set up with a user id and password system 122 as illustrated in the example display page 120 of Figure 10. An inquiry number 124 and an electronic booking confirmation 126 can be created by the host computer system 20. A user 40 can enter this information at page 120 to access the host computer system 20. Port of loading customs information 127 and port of loading insurance information 128 can be provided to the user 40.

15 An example display page is indicated generally at 130 in Figure 11. The page 130 can prompt a user 40 to what type of cargo is to be shipped. For example, four options can be presented: dimensional cargo 131, cars, vans, trucks 132, break bulk 133, and containers 134. When the dimensional cargo option 131 is selected, the user 20 40 is prompted to enter measurements and dimensional information in box 135. The user 40 can be assisted with illustrations by clicking on window 136.

When the cars, vans, truck option 132 is selected, an example display page 140 illustrated in Figure 12 is generated by the host computer system 20. The user 40 is prompted to enter vehicular information in box 145. The user 40 can be assisted with 25 illustrations by clicking on window 146.

When the break bulk option 133 is selected, an example display page 150 illustrated in Figure 13 is generated by the host computer system 20. The user 40 is prompted to enter vehicular information in box 155. The user 40 can be assisted with illustrations by clicking on window 156.

When the containers option 134 is selected, an example display page 160 illustrated in Figure 14 is generated by the host computer system 20. The user 40 is prompted to enter vehicular information in box 165. The user 40 can be assisted with illustrations by clicking on window 166.

5 After the ports of loading and discharge and the type of cargo information have been entered, the host computer system 20 can generate an example display page 170 illustrated in Figure 15. A shipment list 172 and available itineraries 174 are transmitted to the user 40. An inquiry number 176 can be generated and transmitted. The inquiry number 176 permits the user 40 to return to the host computer system 20 within a specified period and receive updates concerning the shipping options, prices, and the like.

10 The host computer system 20 can also assist the user 40 with payment options 182 as illustrated in example display page 180 shown in Figure 16. Other information such as agent information 184 can be transmitted to the user 40. The host computer system 20 can generate an electronic booking confirmation (EBC) 186. The EBC 186 can be used to track a shipment and determine other factors related to a shipment, such as bill of lading instructions.

15 An example display page is indicated generally at 190 in Figure 17. Bill of lading information in box 192 can be generated by the host computer system 20 and transmitted to the user 40. Additional information in box 202 of example display page 200 of Figure 18 can be generated by the host computer system 20.

Additional information such as a vessel itinerary 212 and delivery information 214 of example display page 210 of Figure 19 can be generated by the host computer system 20.

25 A user 40 can access the host computer system 20 to select options for the transportation of cargo, freight, materials, and goods. The system 20 is an interactive system that provides flexibility and updates to the user 40. For example, a user 40 can select a certain cargo transportation carrier, a certain vessel, a certain itinerary, first vessel to available, first vessel to arrive at the port of discharge, price, etc. These selections are available in an efficient manner via an internet connection.

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In accordance with the provisions of the patent statutes, the principle and mode of operation of this invention has been explained and illustrated in its preferred embodiment. However, it must be understood that this invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically explained and illustrated without departing from its spirit or scope. For example, various display pages have been presented that permit a user 40 to enter information into the host computer system 20. Various display pages have been presented that can be generated by the host computer system 20.

Information related to transporting cargo other than the specific examples listed above are within the scope of this system. Additional or different inputs can be received into the host computer system 20. Additional or different outputs can be generated by the host computer system 20 and transmitted to a user 40.